

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee Thank you for taking the time today to hear all the testimonies on this critical bill. My name is Kasie Kirkham, I live in Union Maine. I have lived in Maine for many years. In fact, much of my exploitation happened here in this state. I am asking you to support LDs 1435 an act to Reduce Commercial Sexual Exploitation and LDs 1436 an act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation. I spent many years incarcerated for crimes committed while in the life. When I say life I mean while prostituting or being exploited by another. In fact, one of my worst crimes was when I was found unresponsive next to a man living the same lifestyle. My children were removed and I was charged with endangering the welfare of a child. That charge has followed me through my life making it impossible to obtain employment in any area that includes being a Mainecare billable agency. I am a recovery coach as well as a peer support specialist, and a survivor of exploitation mentor also. to be honest I am overqualified for many positions I was not able to jump into because of the many charges on my record. How degrading to have to explain and how retraumatizing to have to tell my story to stranger after stranger just to obtain employment to feed my children or to help others. It has been seven years since I lived in sexual exploitation and it still haunts me every day. It's not enough that I lived it. I have to tell people why my record is so colorful each time I am told a background check will be done. I go to church and in order to work with children I have to explain why I have prostitution charges and many other petty thefts on my record. This makes life so much more difficult when you have done as much work as I have on myself. I was at my hardest use of substances while being exploited and would have done anything to just feed my habit, the habit that was holding the pain. Now my story is different in many ways as is all of ours. I did not have the resources available to me when coming out of exploitation and was living in a faith-based home for substance use. There were many walls that continued to be hard to climb over because my story and experiences were different. I needed different help that is why Bill LDs 1436 is so important. It wasn't until my testimony was heard from another survivor that I then became a part of a group of women that were healing from the wounds that were caused at the hand of another. I am fully in support of both bills being passed today. I believe the seller should not be charged and I believe the buyer should be held responsible and able to find some type of program available to heal as well. We are all doing what we have been taught works. But cannot start until held accountable for their actions. Also, I am in support of LDs 1436 because we all need to be guided out of the darkness to be led to the light. I had some amazing women take my hand and lead me to finding the root causes of why I continued to think that the way I was living was ok and it wasn't until then that I was able to heal. I hope that my words have made an impact today and continue to be heard by anyone that is being exploited and just doesn't see a way out. Thank you for your time your help and the backing from the state of Maine. I believe we can help all the men and women being exploited find their way home. And all those who are selling and buying find themselves finally held accountable for their ways as well.